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ABSTRACT

This manual provides labor education advisors with basic information on adult learners, specifically members of a union, and barriers to lifelong learning. Definitions of adult learners and lifelong learning are first provided. A background section reports that the number of adults representing the rank and file union membership enrolled in lifelong learning courses and programs falls far behind the average for the general adult population. Barriers to education are listed, and characteristics of the worker/student are discussed that distinguish an adult learner, and particularly a full-time worker, from the traditional full-time college-age student. The following general types of barriers to continuing education are then considered: informational (application procedures, program offerings, academic services), cost (tuition, fees, texts and supplies, transportation), institutional (scheduling, lack of program and classes, filled classes, location), time (family, job and union responsibilities), and personal (self-image, feelings of inadequacy). Suggestions for the labor education advisor to use in order to overcome each barrier are offered. Appendixes include information and a chart on adult development and the life-cycle and a bibliography. (YLB)

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LEAS

EDUCATION AND THE ADULT LEARNER

This is one of a series of topical issue papers commissioned by the Labor Education Advisory Services Program. Dr. Robert J. Pasciullo, author of this paper, is currently Visiting Professor and Assistant to the Director, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, and has held several positions within the State University of New York system.

The generally accepted definition of the adult learner is by age, that is, he or she is twenty-five years of age or older. For the purpose of this mannual, the adult learner has the special characteristic of being a member of a union in either the public or private sector.

There are many overlapping definitions of lifelong learning. Some definitions stress the participation of adults in formal programs of study; others stress non-traditional learning activities in the community or work-place. Some stress basic skills training for undereducated adults while others emphasize vocational training to improve or update skills for job advancement. There are definitions that focus on avocational studies that address self-development and coping skills.

Collectively, these definitions address a broad view of lifelong learning that proposes a redesign of educational opportunities that meet the career and avocational needs of individual and families at each stage of the life cycle.

Lifelong learning, however, is more than a focus on specially designed programs to provide both formal and informal learning opportunities. Lifelong learning refers to the process by which adults continue to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes over their lifetimes. The programs or learning opportunities are activities through which lifelong learning is nurtured.

THE ADULT LEARNER AND THE LEARNING SOCIETY - BACKGROUND:

Succeding the national movement toward universal higher education of the 1950's and 60's when a majority of the traditional college age stuedents were in attendance at universities and colleges, the institutions of higher

education in the 1980's are participating in another nation-wide education movement -- the Learning Society. While estimates vary, the consensus of studies and reports from the federal government and private research groups suggest that annually there are sixty to seventy-five million American adults, age 25 years of age or older, engaged in learning activites, and the number in increasing. With the universities' and colleges' 12.5 million students enrolled full and part time in credit programs, an additional ten million enrolled in non-credit courses, and the large number of adults enrolled in programs sponsored by "Y's," churches, businesses, corporations, trade associations, labor unions, professional groups, etc., the estimate of sixty to seventy-five million is not an exaggeration. According to the 1979 study by the College Board entitled Future Directions for a Learning Society, the adult learning market is composed of 154 million adults. Among the vast number of potential adult learners are approximately 100 million members of the American work force of whom about 25 million are members of organized labor.

The target audience for the LEAS project are idividuals among the 25 million union members who are interested in more information about available educational programs that will provide them with personal enrichment as well as opportunities for career advancement.

These brothers and sisters represent a microcosm of the adult population in all of the work force of the nation in all demographic facets except for the relative proportion enrolling in higher education. Studies indicate that the ratio of the number of adults seeking education is growing twice as fast as the number of adults in the total population; however, the number of adults representing the rank and file union membership enrolled in life-long learning courses and programs falls far behind the average for the general adult population.

The results of a four year study conducted by the National Institute for Work and Learning, Washington, D.C. and released this year, indicate that even with tuition aid programs, few union members take advantage of the opportunity to receive full or partial financial support to continue their education. The report noted that although 85% of the firms with five hundred or more workers had tuition aid programs and between 17 million and 25 million workers are eligible for some level of tuition assistance:

- o No more than 89,000 workers currently take advantage of sponsored education
- o The utilization rate is only four percent of those workers eligible for tuition assistance
- o The utilization rate among blue and pink collar workers is estimated at one to two percent of those eligible for tuition assistance

The resolution for continuing education and/or retraining for a majority of the blue and pink collar work force appears to be simply that more workers should take advantage of the tuition aid programs provided for them. However, in spite of matching educational programs that are available and accessible to the worker that will prepare him/her for the coming industrial world of high technology, the potential worker/student face many barriers.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION:

There are many obstacles that preclude the adult worker from taking advantage of educational opportunities under the tuition aid programs. Some examples of barriers to lifelong learning for the adult worker are:

- o lack of company encouragement
- o lack of time and money
- o lack of confidence and personal ability to cope with learning situations

- o lack of adequate information about programs and procedures
- o inconvenient scheduling and class sites
- o distance from campus and/or learning centers
- o few college level programs designed to serve the educational needs, interests and general characteristics of the working adult in labor unions

A nationwide survey of approximately 2,000 adults, twenty-five years and older, conducted by Carol B. Aslanian and Henry M. Bickell last year, Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adult Learning (College Board, New York City, Summer 1980), reported that many adults interested in changing jobs, advancing their careers, updating their skills, etc., did not know that formalized learning could help them succeed and reach their goals, nor did they realize their own potentials. The study revealed that many adults do not know where they can go to learn or what they have to learn. While this study was not directed to union membership, these results reinforce an earlier study entitled 40 Million Americans in Career Transition (College Board, New York City, Fall 1978), that surveyed American workers who were interested in job change. This study also pointed to the need for more effective educational advisement that reaches the workers at their work sites and union halls. The rising increase in job displacement, either through economic downtrends or rapid advances in technology, documents the imperative for promoting comprehensive educational opportunities for the union member.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKER/STUDENT:

In promoting lifelong learning, one must be aware of and sensitive to those characteristics that distinguish an adult learner, and particularly a full-time worker, from the traditional college age student attending school on a full-time basis. The term full-time student provides the first major

distinction. A full-time worker devotes a minimum of 37½ to 40 hours per week on the job, excluding overtime. Counting commuting time from home to workplace, much of full-time workers' week is consumed earning a living. The traditional college age full-time student attends classes normally between 15-18 hours a week and spends 30-36 hours in study and research, and preparing papers.

The worker/student begins his or her class work and outside activities following a minimum 50-55 hour week working and getting to and from work. Worker/students generally enroll in one or two courses per semester, but there are many workers who enroll in three or four courses each semester to qualify for federal and state assistance. Whatever the situation of the worker/student, time is a critical factor in either returning to school or continuing his or her education.

The importance of time is also manifested in the adult learner's anxiousness to complete the course, program, or degree requirements. Studies by theorists such as Erickson and Havighurst on adult development that have been recently popularized, e.g., Gould's Transformation, Sheehy's Passages, and Levinson's The Seasons of a Man's Life, provide profiles of stages in the adult life cycle. The many ovservers of adult development, whether adopting the developmental approach or the developmental task approach, or a combination of both, perceive the purpose of education is to provide individuals with what will most effectively improve the quality of their existence over their life span -- education for the stimulating experience of learning itself and for its use in solving crises. Appendix A provides a brief description and a chart depicting developmental stages as conceived by researchers in adult development.

Academic skills can be simply defined in this context as having the ability to read, write, speak, and compute effectively at a sufficient

standard required to perform college level work. Many of our co-workers who are truly interested in exploring educational opportunities suffer silently because they feel their skills are inadequate and their egos too frail to contend with college teachers, college work and other students. Recognizing that many workers have had negative experiences in their previous education, there is need for awareness of the problem of emotional adjustment and identity that will have to be resolved before a worker will decide to return to school.

For those individuals with previous college experience, returning to college is not difficult; however, for those less educated and unfamiliar with the college environment, there is a need for additional advisement and counseling.

As mentioned previously, a major barrier to be overcome by this group of workers is their lack of self-conficence in terms of being able to cope with college academically and socially. This lack of self-confidence, and the lack of experience are chracteristics precluding many adults from taking advantage of educational opportunities.

Adults who have minimal formal education have little practice in career planning and goal setting. Their lack of accurate information about education and its relation to job advancement, and where and how to learn new skills hinder them in making decisions.

Because of insufficient knowledge and experience regarding education and career planning, these potential students are unwilling to take the needed risks or make the necessary effort. They are unsure of themselves and do not want to risk embarrassment in the unfamiliar collegiate environment.

SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THE ADULT LEARNER:

The specific needs of the adult learner are related to the general

barriers to continuing education:

1. Information Barriers - application procedures, program offerings, academic services
2. Cost Barriers - tuition, fees, texts and supplies, transportation
3. Institutional Barriers - scheduling, lack of program and classes, filled classes, location
4. Time Barriers - family, job union responsibilities
5. Personal Barriers - self-imamge, feelings of inadequacy

INFORMATION BARRIERS

The first step in promoting lifelong learning among co-workers is the ability to disseminate information about programs and course offerings. An important observation derived from many studies and surveys is that almost half of the people interviewed or surveyed stated they did not have sufficient information concerning the availability and accessibility of continuing education programs. The interest of the potential worker/student is not limited to courses and programs that are sigularly job-related. While many adults perceive continuing education as a means for advancing in their particular vocational field or changing careers, there are workers interested in non-job related courses and programs as a way of increasing their personal enjoyment or developing skills that are useful in daily living. Therefore, information about continuing educational opportunities should include descriptions of both vocational and avocational programs.

COST BARRIERS

There is little need to belabor how money or lack of nomey can determine if one is to begin and/or continue his or her education. The under-utilization of tuition entitlement described earlier in this manual should not be interpreted as lack of interest among the blue and pink collar workers but

rather as a problem inherent in the policies of the tuition-aid program.

The pattern dictating these tuition entitlement packages generally includes the following caveats:

- o Tuition reimbursement is paid upon satisfactory completion of course(s), with a grade of C or above, and in many contracts, reimbursement is limited to fifty or seventy-five percent of tuition
- o Courses allowed under the entitlement plan have to relate directly to the worker's job and be approved by management
- o Texts, fees and course supplies are generally not included in the entitlement package.

Organized labor can address this important issue by joining the lobbyists representing a wide-range of adult education associations requesting legislation at the state and local level to increase or to offer financial support to part-time adult students. They can more directly negotiate contracts that provide for the tuition entitlement paid "up-front" by the company and include texts and related supplies. Although the possibility exists that motivation for completing a course or courses successfully could be diminished because there is no personal "investment" by the worker, there are procedural safeguards that can be adopted to minimize abuses. Organized labor, through the collective bargaining process, can make the tuition entitlement program an important benefit to many more of its members than the four percent who are presently receiving tuition support.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that colleges and universities have increased their enrollment of students over 35 years old by 36.8 percent in the last five years, and nearly one-sixth of the people in the 25-34 age group are enrolled in some kind of educational institution. The

importance of these increased enrollments from the ranks of the non-traditional student are not unnoticed by university and college officials in this decade of decline in the 18-24 year old population. However, institutional barriers still exist for adults desiring to continue their education.

The unmet educational needs often relate directly to the manner in which learning experiences for adults are being provided and supported by colleges and universities.

The Labor Education Advisors, in cooperation with the institutions' representatives, can be instrumental in helping to minimize these barriers and recommend innovative formats that are appropriate to the educational needs of their co-workers.

They can propose and develop innovations such as:

- o better sequence of courses
- o more weekend courses
- o exclusively weekend degree programs
- o abbreviated semesters made possible by longer individual class sessions
- o self-paced study
- o early evening courses
- o use of TV, radio, and audio cassettes for instructional delivery
- o convenient locations -- union hall, work site
- o schedule of more courses and convenient sites
- o more effective communication between institution and both actual and potential adult students
- o additional counseling and career planning
- o better information on course/program offerings
- o access to administrative and academic counseling services in evenings and on weekends
- o orientation of faculty to principles of adult development and learning

TIME BARRIER

Most national and state studies agree that lack of time is among the chief obstacles to adult participation in lifelong learning activities. The Labor Education Advisor's role is somewhat limited in terms of overcoming this barrier. Unlike the other categories, the time factor as perceived by the potential or actual student can preclude participating in lifelong learning. The Labor Education Advisor can assist the co-worker through discussion of managing one's time, establishing or rearranging personal goals and priorities.

Encouraging a co-worker to "try his or her hand" as a first time student when the time factor is a critical barrier could become a negative experience for the individual and "turn off" the pursuit of lifelong learning unless attitudinal changes occur from time management discussions.

The major effort to be made by the Labor Education Advisor should be with the college and university representatives to have the institution provide greater flexibility in programming and services to provide maximum opportunities for the adult to participate in educational activities.

PERSONAL BARRIERS

The image that adults desire to present when entering educational, job related, or social activites is one of purposefulness and responsibility. Unfortunately, many adults, particularly those with fewer years of formal education, suffer from lack of self-confidence or feelings of inadequacy when considering the proposition of continuing their education on a college or university campus.

Adults in the formal setting of a college classroom have something real to lose in this situation. Self-esteem and ego are on the line when they are asked to risk trying a new behavior in front of their peers and

traditional aged college students. Negative experiences in traditional education, feelings about authority and concern for events external to the classroom -- family, job, career, all affect an adult's decision to continue his or her education.

Awareness of the need for adults to avoid situations in which they would be treated as dependent learners, is important in assessing the academic skills of the adult learner so he or she can avoid those embarrassing situations and be able to cope successfully with the college experience.

Adults want their learning to be problem centered, personalized, and receptive of their need for self-direction and personal responsibility. With the help of the college counseling staff, assessments of the educational and developmental needs of each individual the adult learners can be directed into educational activities that are appropriate to their interests, abilities, and future goals.

APPENDIX A

ADULT DEVELOPMENT STAGES

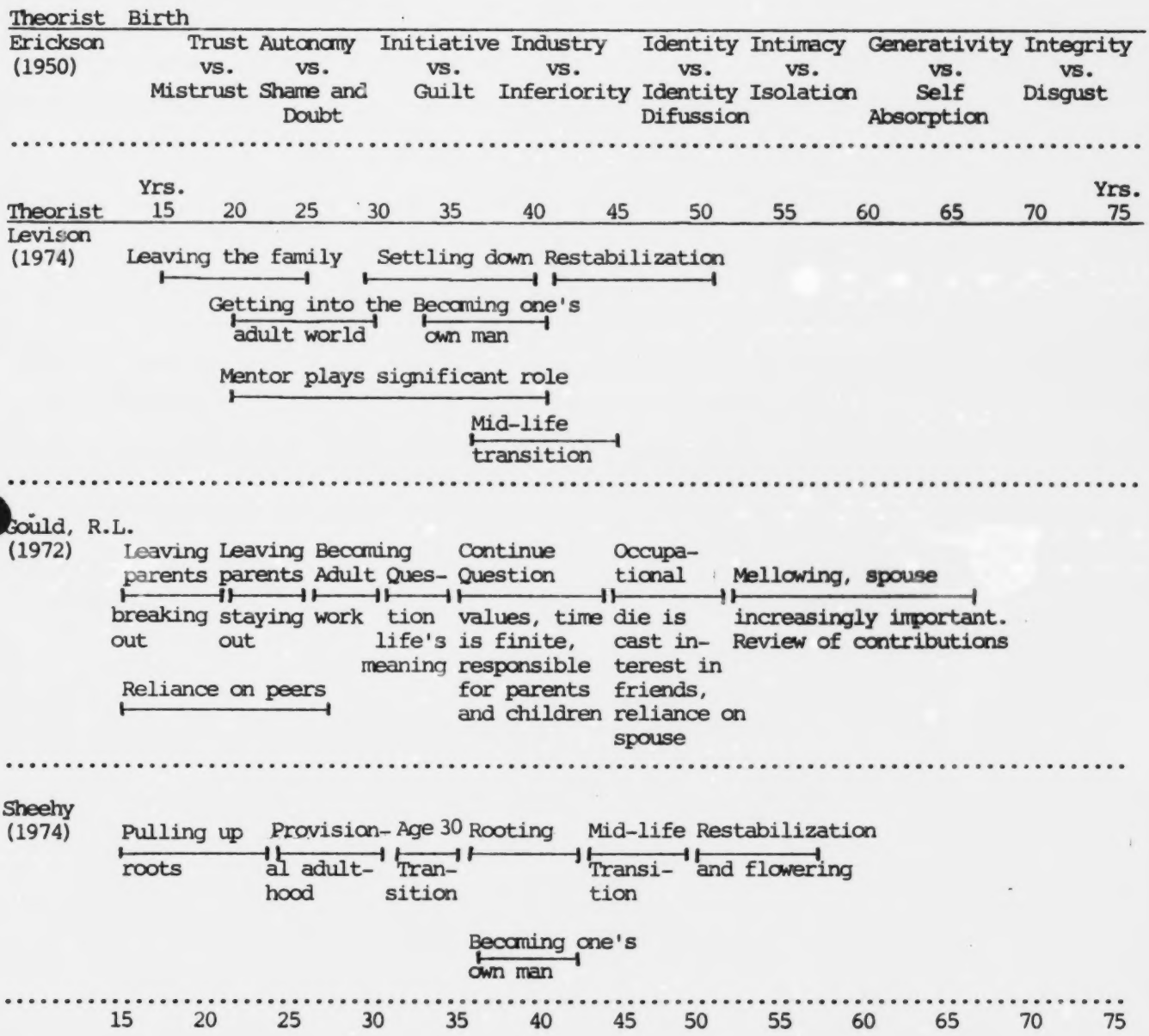
The theories and research concerning development stages and developmental ages have important implications for adult educators and counselors. The data concerning developmental ages and the life cycle can assist those working with adults to understand more clearly what takes place in growing older and what are the appropriate conceptual frameworks to encourage lifelong learning.

The research can help to clarify the motivations behind the personal commitment and investments of time, money, energy and often the personal sacrifices made by many adult students. These studies also help the educator/counselor to understand the importance to an adult of pursuing a promotion or a career change, the desire to explore new ideas and interests, and to meet new persons.

By recognizing these general patterns in the life cycle and responding to individual differences, the ability to counsel the worker/students and to help them identify their own motives and educational needs will be substantially enhanced. When the research and theory are taken into account, the educational activities will be more focused and programs can be more effectively planned to meet the need of the worker/student.

While this manual is not the place for other than a note of the importance of the field of adult development and the life cycle, the chart below and the bibliography in Appendix B provide a starting point for those Labor Education Advisors who desire to have clearer insights into their co-workers' personal growth and development, as well as their own.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES


Theorist Birth
Erickson (1950)
Trust vs. Mistrust
Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
Initiative vs. Guilt
Industry vs. Inferiority
Identity vs. Identity Difussion
Intimacy vs. Isolation
Generativity vs. Self Absorption
Integrity vs. Disgust
Yrs.
Theorist 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 Yrs. 75
Levison (1974)
Leaving the family
Settling down
Restabilization
Getting into the adult world
Becoming one's own man
Mentor plays significant role
Mid-life transition
Gould, R.L. (1972)
Leaving parents breaking out
Leaving parents staying out
Becoming Adult work
Ques- tion life's meaning
Continue Question values, time is finite, responsible for parents and children
Occupa- tional die is cast in- terest in friends, reliance on spouse
Mellowing, spouse increasingly important. Review of contributions
Reliance on peers
Sheehy (1974)
Pulling up roots
Provision- al adult- hood
Age 30 Tran- sition
Rooting
Mid-life Transi- tion
Restabilization and flowering
Becoming one's own man
15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75

Adapted from McCoy, V., Ryan, C. and Lichtenberg, J. The Adult Life Cycle, 1978. p. 192

APPENDIX B

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